

STATEMENT OF PAUL HOFFMAN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, FISH AND WILDLIFE AND PARKS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 2129 TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCES STUDY REGARDING THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF DESIGNATING CERTAIN HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND AREAS IN TAUNTON, MASSACHUSETTS, AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JUNE 15, 2004

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 2129, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resources study regarding the suitability and feasibility of designating certain historic buildings and areas in Taunton, Massachusetts, as a unit of the National Park System. The Department does not support this bill.

The City of Taunton, located in southeastern Massachusetts in Bristol County, can trace its routes back to the earliest days of our Nation. The first county courthouse was built in Taunton in 1772, and the town served as an organizational center for the Revolutionary War. In 1774, Taunton was the site of the raising of the Liberty and Union flag, one of the earliest actions to gain international attention as a symbol of America's defiance of British rule and taxation. The town settlement was anchored around the Taunton River and its tributaries, which provided a focus for its shipbuilding and shipping activities during the 1800s. The historic nature of the city draws tourists to visit the well-preserved greens and houses that date back to the 1800s. Taunton's history spans from its earliest beginnings as an agrarian hinterland to its development as a major industrial urban core (particularly for iron) and regional political center during the Revolutionary War. The city emerged at an early date as a regional communications focus for the exchange and interaction of goods, people, and information.

The bill proposes that the Secretary conduct a study of historic buildings and areas in Taunton, to evaluate the suitability and feasibility of designating them as a unit of the

National Park System. The study is to be conducted in accordance with the National Park Service Organic Act (16 U.S.C. 1a-5). In addition to the criteria set out in the Organic Act, the bill also requires an evaluation of these areas against a list of criteria commonly seen in study legislation for evaluating individual National Heritage Areas, and not part of the usual evaluation of a park unit.

The Department has concerns about enactment of this bill, because the named historic resources have been studied and determined not to be nationally significant, the first criterion that must be met for inclusion in the National Park System as spelled out in the Organic Act and in *National Park Service Management Policies 2001*. Most of the historic resources cited in the findings appear in a Multiple Resource Area assessment, completed in 1984, which formed the basis for listing properties in the National Register of Historic Places. This document states that the properties are listed for their *local* significance, rather than for their state or national significance. According to the Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), none of the resources listed have been determined to have national significance.

The Department is concerned with H.R. 2129 because other authorities and mechanisms exist at the Federal, State, and local levels, to support the preservation of resources of local significance. To expend limited study funds on resources that are known not to meet National Park Service standards seems ill-advised when the Department is pressed to meet the budgetary needs of previously authorized studies of nationally significant resources.

Currently, the National Park Service is in various stages of progress with 31 studies previously authorized by Congress. These studies are focusing on potential National Park System Units, National Heritage Areas, additions to the Wild and Scenic River System, or additions to the National Trails System. Our highest priority is to complete the studies previously authorized by Congress, and to begin work on newly authorized studies as soon as funds are available.

In addition, the Department notes that the National Park Service is currently in the midst of a National Wild and Scenic River Study of the Taunton River, authorized by Congress in December 2000. The City of Taunton is actively engaged in this process along with the nine other communities that abut the main stem of the Taunton River. Historical and cultural resources associated with the river, including sites in the City of Taunton, are an important part of the study, recognizing that the river has a rich history dating from Native American use to colonial settlement and early industrial development. The study is expected to be completed in 2005.

It would appear that the Wild and Scenic River Study is evaluating many of the same resources identified in H.R. 2129, such as whether there exists an assemblage of resources that represent distinctive aspects of American heritage worthy of recognition, conservation, and interpretation and that provide outstanding recreational and educational opportunities. Furthermore, the Wild and Scenic River Study is appropriately considering a larger area than the city limits of Taunton. To launch an overlapping study with similar but slightly different criteria from those governing the Wild and Scenic River Study, would seem to invite both confusion and duplication.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.